

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 MANAGU 00787 01 OF 02 161008Z
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----038955 161011Z /23

P R 162158Z FEB 78
FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5751
INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS
AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 MANAGUA 787

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, NU
SUBJECT: GO FORTH AND SPREAD THE WORD

REF: MANAGUA 0782

SUMMARY: AMBASSADOR AND SOMOZA HAD FURTHER SESSION IN WHICH SOMOZA'S ATTITUDES TOWARD CHANGE WERE FURTHER EXPLORED. AMBASSADOR INSISTED ON SOMOZA MAKING STATEMENTS AND TAKING ACTIONS WHICH WOULD ESTABLISH CLIMATE FOR RENEWED DIALOGUE. SOMOZA WANTED AMBASSADOR TO SPREAD THE WORD TO THE OPPOSITION HE IS WILLING TO UNDERTAKE FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES. END SUMMARY.

1. FOLLOWING PRIVATE LUNCHEON TO WHICH AMBASSADOR INVITED SOMOZA ON FEBRUARY 14, A TWO-HOUR CONVERSATION ENSURED ON THE NEED FOR CHANGE AND THE PROBLEMS WHICH SOMOZA FORESEES. THE MAJOR THEMES WERE THE NEED FOR SOMOZA TO TAKE THE INITIATIVE IN PROVIDING A CLIMATE FOR DIALOGUE, THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH, AND U.S. POLICY.

2. AMBASSADOR DESCRIBED HIS SEPARATE MEETINGS WITH WILLIAM BAEZ AND
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 MANAGU 00787 01 OF 02 161008Z

THE ARCHBISHOP (REFTEL). HE SAID BAEZ CREDITED THE GOVERNMENT WITH NOT HAVING TAKEN REPRISALS AND THAT THIS WAS POSITIVE. THE ARCH-BISHOP, HOWEVER, WAS UNHAPPY OVER SUCH ACTIONS AS REPRISALS AGAINST RADIO CATOLICA. SOMOZA ASKED WHAT HE COULD DO. HE SAID THE RADIO KEPT PLAYING PROTEST MUSIC OVER AND OVER. HE SAID IT WAS INCITING TO REBEL. SOMOZA EXPLAINED IN THE PAST THE CHURCH GOT PRETTY MUCH WHAT IT WANTED FROM THE GOVERNMENT. NOW NOTHING SATISFIED THEM. IT

IS A CONCERN FOR HIM. SOMOZA SAID HE HAD DONE EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO ACCOMMODATE THE ARCHBISHOP EXCEPT TO KNEEL BEFORE HIM. HE SAID HIS PAST POLICY OF NOT PAYING TOO MUCH ATTENTION TO THE CHURCH AND LETTING THEIR EMOTIONS DISSIPATE HAD PAID OFF BUT IT WASN'T WORKING NOW BECAUSE THE CHURCH HAD INTENSIFIED ITS OPPOSITION. AMBASSADOR SAID HE REALIZED THERE WERE ABUSES IN MEDIA DISTORTIONS AND ATTACKS ON THE GON THAT WOULDN'T BE ACCEPTABLE ANYWHERE AND THAT PERSONS RESPONSIBLE WOULD BE FINED. HOWEVER, HE FELT THAT IF IT WERE CLEAR THAT SOMOZA WERE DEFINITELY HEADED TOWARD DEMOCRATIZATION, THAT THE ARCHBISHOP WOULD SUPPORT THAT EFFORT. EMBASSY COMMENT: PRO-GON RADIO STATIONS ARE AS BAD AS ANTI-SOMOZA STATIONS. THEY REFER TO MOST ANTI-GON MOVEMENTS AS EXTREMIST OR COMMUNIST. BOTH SIDES ARE EQUALLY IRRESPONSIBLE, BUT THE GON OBVIOUSLY TAKES NO ACTION AGAINST THOSE STATIONS SUPPORTING IT.

3. ON THE ISSUE OF SOMOZA'S WILLINGNESS TO RELINQUISH CONTROL OF THE NATIONAL GUARD, THE PRESIDENT AGAIN RETURNED TO THE THEME OF THE UNREST AND BICKERING THAT WOULD ENSURE AMONG THE COLONELS WHEN IT WAS ANNOUNCED. AMBASSADOR CONTINUED TO INSIST THAT ANNOUNCEMENT OF HIS READINESS TO RELINQUISH THE POSITION OF CHIEF DIRECTOR WAS IMPORTANT TO PERCEPTIONS OF HIS READINESS TO DEMOCRATIZE THE SYSTEM. SOMOZA AGREED THAT IN HIS UPCOMING SPEECH HE WOULD CLARIFY THAT AT THE END OF HIS TERM HE PLANS TO RETURN TO PRIVATE LIFE.

4. AMBASSADOR AGAIN GAVE SOMOZA THE PITCH THAT HE OUGHT TO LEAVE OFFICE AS A DEMOCRAT. DESPITE HIS AND HIS FAMILIES OUTSTANDING
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 MANAGU 00787 01 OF 02 161008Z

CAPABILITIES THAT THE PEOPLE WERE FED UP WITH A DYNASTIC TYPE OF RULE. HE USED ANALOGIES OF BATISTA'S MISTAKE IN RETAKING POWER WHEN HE DIDN'T HAVE POPULAR SUPPORT, AS OPPOSED TO DE GAULLE'S RETAKING POWER WITH OVERWHELMING NATIONAL SUPPORT AND DEPARTURE FROM POWER WHEN HE NO LONGER HAD THAT SUPPORT. SOMOZA AGREED THAT HE CLEARLY SHOULD RETIRE, THAT HE WOULD LIKE TO BE AN ELDER STATESMAN AND PERHAPS TAKE A POSITION IN THE SENATE.

5. ON DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS, SOMOZA EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT HE COULD NOT SAFEGUARD HIS INTERESTS IF ANYONE COULD BE ELECTED. AMBASSADOR SAID, ON THE OTHER HAND, THAT HE COULD INFLUENCE PEOPLE TOWARD A PEACEFUL SOLUTION OF THE POLICIAL SITUATION ONLY IF THERE IS CONFIDENCE IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS. IF THE OPPOSITION REFUSES TO DIALOGUE EVEN WITH THE PROMISE OF AN OPPORTUNITY TO TEST THEIR STRENGTH IN ELECTIONS, THEN SOMOZA WOULD HAVE TO ACT UNILATERALLY. HE WOULD HAVE TO PROVIDE ON HIS OWN FOR NON-SOMOZA RULE. HE COULD PROVIDE FOR SOME NEW BLOOD TO COME INTO THE SYSTEM IN ORDER TO NEUTRALIZE THE POLARIZATION. SOMOZA AGREED THAT IS WHAT HE WOULD TRY TO DO. SOMOZA ALSO AGREED WITH THE AMBASSADOR'S SUGGESTION THAT IT WOULD BE A GOOD IDEA TO TRY TO BRING NON-REGIME LEGAL EXPERTS INTO THE CURRENT STUDY OF HOW TO OPEN UP THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM. THE AMBASSADOR ASKED SOMOZA IF HER WERE NOT WORRIED THAT

IN HONEST ELECTIONS THE OPPOSITION MIGHT WIN IN LIGHT OF THE CURRENT ATTITUDES AGAINST THEM. SOMOZA SAID THAT IT WAS BETTER IN THE PAST WHEN HE AND THE OPPOSITION COULD SIT DOWN AND NEGOTIATE WINNING CANDIDATES, BUT THAT HE COULD LIVE WITH AN OPPOSITION VICTORY IF THE CANDIDATE WAS A RESPONSIBLE PERSON. IN RESPONSE TO AMBASSADOR'S QUERY HE AGREED THAT IF RAMIRO SACASA (UDEL OPPOSITIONIST LIBERAL) BECAME PRESIDENT HE COULD LIVE WITH IT EVEN THOUGH HE WOULD PREFER TO SEE HIS OWN CANDIDATE WIN. THE AMBASSADOR ASKED WHAT MECHANISM COULD BE ESTABLISHED TO GUARANTEE HONEST ELECTIONS. SOMOZA SAID IT WOULD BE UNACCEPTABLE TO HAVE DIRECT U.S. SUPERVISION AND COUNTING VOTES BUT THAT SOME INTERNATIONAL SUPERVISION WOULD BE ACCEPTABLE.

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PAGE 01 MANAGU 00787 02 OF 02 152322Z
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----031479 161013Z /23

P R 152158Z FEB 78
FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5752
INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS
AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

SECRET SECTION 2 OF 2 MANAGUA 0787

EXDIS

6. SOMOZA COMPLAINED ABOUT THE RECENT HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT ON NICARAGUA. HE FELT IT WAS NOT OBJECTIVE AND SHOWED A BIAS. HOWEVER, HE AGREED WITH AMBASSADOR THAT, ALTHOUGH STRONG IN SOME POINTS, REPORT WAS NOT TOO NEGATIVE ON NICARAGUA. HE ALSO EXPRESSED HIS CONCERN THAT PRESIDENT CARTER WILL GET THE CREDIT FOR CHANGES HE WILL UNDERTAKE TOWARD DEMOCRATIZATION. AMBASSADOR ASSURED SOMOZA THAT WE WANT THE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM TO BE A NICARAGUAN SOLUTION AND FOR HIM TO GET CREDIT FOR CHANGES HE MAKES. SOMOZA SAID HE STILL FEELS THAT THE U.S. IS A FRIEND OF NICARAGUA BUT THAT WE ARE EMBARRASSED TO BE ASSOCIATED WITH SOMOZA BECAUSE OF SOME OF THE PRACTICES SUCH AS KEEPING CONTROL OF THE GN. HE SAID HE WANTS TO MAKE SOME CHANGE SO THAT THE U.S. WILL NO LONGER BE EMBARRASSED.

7. SOMOZA HAS COMMITTED HIMSELF TO SENDING AN IMPORTANT SIGNAL TO THE OPPOSITION AT HIS UPCOMING POLITICAL RALLY (TWO WEEKS AWAY) THAT HE

IS READY FOR A CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE AND FOR AN HONEST ELECTORAL SOLUTION TO THE POLITICAL CRISIS. HE WANTED THE AMBASSADOR TO BE SPREADING THE WORD THAT HE IS DISPOSED TO DIALOGUE AND MAKE FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES. THE AMBASSADOR IN RESPONSE ARGUED THAT TO BE ABLE TO INFLUENCE THE OPPOSITION THEY WILL HAVE TO SEE FROM SOMOZA

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 MANAGU 00787 02 OF 02 152322Z

EVIDENCE OF HIS EARNESTNESS.

8. COMMENT: FROM THE THREE RECENT SESSIONS WITH SOMOZA THE PICTURE WHICH IS BECOMING CLEAR IS THAT HE SEEMS TO ACCEPT IN PRIVATE THE NEED FOR REFORMS AND RELINQUISHMENT OF POWER BUT IS VERY CONCERNED ABOUT WHAT THIS WILL MEAN TO HIM AND HIS FAMILY IN THE FUTURE. HE IS WORRIED ABOUT CHURCH ACTIVISM, ABOUT THE NATIONAL GUARD WHEN HE NO LONGER IS KEEPING IT IN LINE, AND ABOUT THE U.S. ROLE. THESE CONCERNS LEAD HIM TO CONTINUE TO REMINISCE ABOUT THE GOOD OLD DAYS WHEN EVERYTHING WAS UNDER CONTROL AND TO SPECULATE AS TO WHETHER HE COULD RETURN TO THESE CONDITIONS IF HE CONTINUES TO HOLD POWER. IT IS THIS VACILLATION WHICH MAKES CONTINUED PRESSURE FROM US NECESSARY TO PREVENT HIM FROM BACKSLIDING. IT WILL BE SOME TIME BEFORE HE WILL BE IRREVOCABLY COMMITTED TO FOLLOW THE CHANGES HE HAS ACCEPTED IN THEORY. IN THE MEANTIME WE WILL CONTINUE TO PRESS FOR OTHER CONCESSIONS WHICH WILL IMPROVE THE ATMOSPHERE FOR A DIALOGUE.

9. ACTION REQUESTED: I PLAN TO HAVE ONE FURTHER MEETING WITH SOMOZA NEXT WEEK AND WE WILL BE DISCUSSING THE MESSAGE HE WILL BE COMMUNICATING IN HIS SPEECH THE FOLLOWING WEEKEND. ANY SUGGESTIONS FROM THE DEPARTMENT REGARDING THAT MEETING WOULD BE WELCOME.
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